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March 8, 2014

Connecticut Legislature  
Education Committee  
re: Education Reform Policy, 3/12 public hearing

This year marks my twenty-third year in the classroom. I have had two first year experiences in two urban schools; one in New York and one in Connecticut. Although those first year experiences were both very challenging, neither were as overwhelming and discouraging as this year has been for me. I teach Family and Consumer Science at the high school level. The course I teach is Child Development and I conduct an on-site preschool program as a hands on experience. The program services over one hundred high school students and some thirty local preschoolers. The experience prepares some for careers in education, social work and nursing but more importantly, prepares my high school students for future parenting.

I never doubt that I am in the right profession. My energy for the classroom is still strong but much is being zapped by overwhelming and unrealistic written requirements. I love teaching and could not think of another career I would prefer. I am proud to say that many of my former students write to me about their new careers in the classroom. Many are now teachers. They reflect upon the positive experiences they had in my classroom that inspired them to teach. I am so very proud of them. However, some days I question whether I can continue to encourage students to pursue careers in education. I still do, but with much ambivalence.

Someone recently put it very simply but totally accurately. "I have never worked so hard and taught so little." When I think of the experiences my students had in past years, I am saddened to think of what they have missed this year. Many valuable experiences have been replaced by exercises I do simply to fulfill demands asked of me for data.

Last year I was absent nine day because of my son's medical crisis with a brain tumor and a additional week off with hurricane Sandy. I was able to finish all units in time for our preschool opening in March. This year many hands on activities and meaningful experiences, such a day exchange with a bilingual kindergarten, were dropped due to lack of time. When I say lack of time, it is sometimes true lack of time in the school schedule since so much time is devoted to PD days and days where my time is devoted to CFA's and post testing to obtain data. But some of the "lack of time" is from a planning perspective. So much paper work is required that takes away from the time and energy needed to set up

for some more elaborate activities in the classroom. For example, the midyear IObservation required under the Marzano system took me about six hours to complete. I could have used that time and energy for new ideas introduced at a recent optional after school PD. My husband was in upper management for a major corporation for years. He reviewed what I was required to complete for this evaluation and was in disbelief at the length and complexity. The Marzano Lesson plan format requires so much information. I do believe it is necessary to plan but I also know that a plan is only as good as the person executing that plan. I compare it to a screenplay. An excellent script can be performed by Robert DiNiro or a high school drama student; there is a big difference in the end product! The true beneficiaries of all this educational reform are the companies publishing these programs, not my students!

I write this, not so much for me since my remaining time in the classroom is limited. I do have concerns for new teachers. The data driven environment is so overwhelming that new teachers who would develop into great teachers over time, may never survive! If this had been my first year of teaching, I cannot honestly say I would have been able to cope. I have one prep and sometimes feel overwhelmed. I know new teachers who have three or four preps. Unless they are capable of surviving on three to four hours sleep, I do not see how they can complete those detailed lesson plans on a daily basis.

Many of the directives connected to teacher evaluations also cause administrators to practice procedures which are non productive to the nurturing of new teachers. I am grateful I am not a rookie! I have heard that during the first two weeks of school two to three administrators walked into classrooms together for informal observation of new teachers. I wonder what purpose is served by this practice? Couldn't a visit by one administrator, acting as a mentor, serve the purpose of monitoring classroom performance for new teachers? Three administrators walking into a new teacher's room seems more like managing through fear and intimidation. This week I learned that a first year English teacher in my school recently resigned. I was saddened to hear but not surprised. She studied years for a teaching career but a few short months in this data driven environment will perhaps keep her from ever returning to the classroom. How many more like her are experiencing the same unnecessary stress all over Connecticut? How many will we lose?

I urge a total reevaluation of education reform policy so educators can return to the task of what we do best, educating the children of Connecticut.

Sincerely,

Linda Mitten

